

Message Text

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60

ACTION ARA-20

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 AID-20 CIAE-00 COME-00 EB-11 INR-11

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FM AMEMBASSY PORT OF SPAIN

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6727

INFO AMEMBASSY BRIDGETOWN

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: ELAB, PINT, TD

SUBJ: TWO MAJOR UNRESOLVED LABOR DISPUTES PARTIALLY
CRIPPLE TRINIDAD

REF: POS 1698

1. FOR THE PAST TWO WEEKS, EMPLOYEES AT THE TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO TELEPHONE COMPANY (TELCO) HAVE REFUSED TO WORK DUE TO A DISPUTE OVER MANAGEMENT'S HIRING A 59-YEAR-OLD SENIOR EXECUTIVE (TELCO POLICY REQUIRES NEARLY ALL EMPLOYEES TO RETIRE AT AGE 60). ALTHOUGH TELCO HAS OFFERED AS A COM-PROMISE TO HIRE HIM AS A CONSULTANT AND NOT AN EXECUTIVE, THE COMMUNICATION WORKERS' UNION (CWU) HAS NOT YET CALLED OFF ITS STRIKE, INSISTING INSTEAD ON COMPLETE ACQUIESCENCE BY TELCO. RESULT HAS BEEN LOSS OF ALL OUTGOING INTERNATIONAL TELEPHONE AND COMMERCIAL TELEX SERVICE, AND PERHAPS ONE-THIRD OF ALL DOMESTIC TELEPHONES IN TRINIDAD ARE NOW INOPERATIVE, WITH NUMBER GROWING DAILY. AT THE SAME TIME, POSTAL EMPLOYEES ARE ON A "GO SLOW" IN PROTEST AGAINST MANAGEMENT'S NOT HAVING ADOPTED A NUMBER OF RECOMMENDA-TIONS RECENTLY MADE BY A GOVERNMENT COMMISSION INVESTI-GATING THE POSTAL SERVICE. COMBINED EFFECT OF BOTH LABOR ACTIONS HAS BEEN SEVERE UPON LOCAL COMMERCE, AND
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IS BEGINNING TO BE FELT BY MOST OTHER SEGMENTS OF SOCIETY.

2. AGAINST THIS BACKGROUND, THE ANNUAL MEETINGS OF THE CWU AND THE PUBLIC SERVICES ASSOCIATION (PSA) ATTRACTED MUCH ATTENTION. NEITHER LABOR MINISTER HECTOR MCCLEAN, WHO WAS SUPPOSED TO ADDRESS THE CWU, NOR FINANCE MINISTER GEORGE CHAMBERS, SLATED TO SPEAK TO THE PSA, ATTENDED THE PUBLIC CONVENTIONS, BUT BOTH SENT STAND-INS TO READ HARD-HITTING SPEECHES WHICH GENERALLY BACKED MANAGEMENT AND URGED THAT THE UNIONS BARGAIN AT THE NEGOTIATING TABLE AND NOT THROUGH STRIKES AND THE PUBLIC MEDIA. GEORGE WEEKES, LEADER OF THE RADICAL OILFIELD WORKERS' TRADE UNION (OWTU)--THE PRINCIPAL RIVAL OF THE PSA AND THE CWU IN TERMS OF POLITICAL POWER--ATTENDED AND SPOKE AT BOTH UNIONS' ANNUAL CONVENTIONS, IN AN APPARENT GESTURE TOWARD LABOR UNITY.

3. COMMENT: IT IS WIDELY PRESUMED THAT THE CWU STRIKE IS THE RESULT OF THE LOSS OF THE TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO LABOR CONGRESS (TTLC) PRESIDENCY BY CWU SECRETARY GENERAL, SENATOR CARL TULL (REFTEL), AND HIS NEED TO REASSERT HIMSELF AS AN INFLUENTIAL LABOR LEADER. HIS ACTION ALSO FORCED NEW TTLC PRESIDENT JAMES MANSWELL (WHO IS ALSO HEAD OF THE PSA) INTO A MILITANT POSITION CALLING FOR SUPPORT OF THE CWU AND THREATENING TO CALL THE PSA OUT ON STRIKE UNLESS GOVERNMENT CONDUCTS MEANINGFUL NEGOTIATIONS ON PSA DEMANDS (INCLUDING A 60 PERCENT WAGE HIKE). THE PSA MEMBERSHIP NUMBERS OVER 10,000 AND INCLUDES MOST OF THE MONTHLY PAID CIVIL SERVANTS; THUS A STRIKE IN THIS SECTOR COULD BE QUITE CRIPPLING. (CYNICS CLAIM, HOWEVER, THAT IT WOULD BE IMPOSSIBLE TO DISCERN A "GO SLOW" ACTION IF SUCH WERE UNDERTAKEN BY GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES.) THE CURRENT IMPASSE IN THE LABOR SCENE AGAIN UNDERSCORES THE GOTT'S EXTREME RELUCTANCE TO EMPLOY THE PROVISIONS OF THE INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS ACT, WHICH PERMITS THE DECLARATION OF STRIKES AS ILLEGAL IF THEY TAKE PLACE IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR OR ARE AGAINST THE PUBLIC INTEREST.

MILLER

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Message Attributes

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